

# Japan Christian Activity News

PUBLISHED  
BY NCC J

ISSN:0021-4353

Property of  
Graduate Theological Union

#685 DECEMBER, 1990

JAN 04 1991

## Peace on Earth Season's Greetings



Wood Carving by: Toshiko KISHIDA  
Baptized at the age of 60, the artist is now 94  
years old and going strong.

### RACHEL'S TEARS

By Munetoshi MAEJIMA  
NCC/J General Secretary

The Gospels relate the good news of Christmas in juxtaposition to the tragedy of the slaughter of the innocents under two years of age in Bethlehem and throughout the region. Thus the great joy of the Savior comes alongside such unimaginable destruction, pain, and suffering.

During this time of year I can hear Rachel weeping from within the Philippines. In 1972 I was living in a small shack facing a large banana plantation. Each morning I would buy a few rolls for my breakfast from a nearby store, and each time I asked for a cup of hot water from the house next door where a mother and her small baby lived.

I didn't notice the condition of the mother's health, nor whether they had enough food to eat, until the baby died. When I saw the mother with her dead baby I simply could not find words to console her, try as I would.

I am reminded of this painful experience whenever I hear the story of Herod slaughtering the innocents.

When we reach the utter depths of sorrow there are no words suited to our comfort. Sympathy and consolation mean nothing. The Gospel does not intend to comfort us but rather the Gospel begins with this slaughter, this desolation.

The main character in the Christmas story is the baby Jesus who remains silent throughout. The supporting characters in the persons of the Magi were watching the night stars while all the other people round about were sleeping.

The Magi offered their gifts to Jesus not in Jerusalem but in the small town of Bethlehem. By the social standards of the day such was a ludicrous act; gifts presented to a baby born in a manger not even at the center of



the day's political activities?

Moreover, the Magi departed into their country through an alternate route after seeing the baby, thereby not seeing Herod again.

The mandate of the Gospel for the Christian is to act as the Magi acted by always taking a supporting role in God's continuing salvation history. Whatever we may do to alleviate suffering, pain, and anguish, may seem at the time to be insignificant.

Like the Magi seeking the signs of the times in the movement of the constellations, we also are to seek out alternative routes to salvation as we struggle to empower the powerless.

### **BEING THE SALT OF THE EARTH**

Thirty First NCC/J  
General Assembly

From March 18 to 19, 1991, the National Christian Council in Japan will hold its thirty-first General Assembly under the theme, "Being the Salt of the Earth." (Matthew 5:13)

Under the theme of the thirtieth Triennial General Assembly, "Peace, Justice and Life," the NCC/J continued its ecumenical activities in coordination with the World Council of Churches under its theme of "Peace, Justice and the Integrity of Creation."

The coming of the year 1990, the beginning of the last decade of the twentieth century, brought with it a period of great trial for Christians in Japan, for there were confrontations with the various ceremonies related to the enthronement of the new emperor. Also, just before his enthronement ceremony there was an attempt on the part of the government to deploy the Self-Defense Forces abroad in response to the Gulf crisis. This reminded us of the fact that at the time of emperor Hirohito's enthronement ceremony in 1926,

Japan was invading China.

It is part of our Christian witness to struggle against the emperor system, for said system is a symbol of the destruction of justice while it also enhances militarism. Therefore it only succeeds in destroying peace and life.

We realize that we must dare to be a vocal minority in Japanese society maintaining opposition to the emperor system. As consequence, those Christians who have stated their convictions in regard to the emperor's war responsibility have become targets of violence.

At the thirty-first General Assembly we will renew our conviction that we must act as a vocal and involved minority in Japan. Although we are poor in spirit we have been given the role of being the salt of the earth for the glorification of God. With the blessings of God the NCC/J will continue its ecumenical tasks of working toward Christian unity and cooperation.

May the great joy of Christmas be with you always.

Munetoshi MAEJIMA  
NCC/J General Secretary

### **SEEKING SALT'S SALTINESS**

By Chiya SATO

Where is peace today? Through my experiences of participation in the anti-nuclear movement I am convinced that always the powerless in society become the victims of war.

In the Tsugaru area of Japan in a United Church of Christ women's meeting one woman narrated her and her movement's ways of protesting the proposed spent nuclear fuels reprocessing plant in Rokkasho Village, Aomori Prefecture, northern Japan.

At first I thought that nuclear technology issues should be decided by politicians and could not understand why mothers with small children were demonstrating against nuclear power plants.



After learning about nuclear problems through books and attending lectures, I realized the vast extent of the great threat involved, which, will be detrimental to all life on the face of the earth. We asked women's groups in the Suguru district to attend meetings so as to know about the Chernobyl nuclear disaster and there we were able to exchange opinions.

While the Aomori governor decided to go ahead with the construction of the spent nuclear fuels reprocessing plant without asking the villagers' as to their opinions, I worked in demonstrations with others in Hirosaki and Aomori cities rallying people against the reprocessing plant and demanding that the village not become the dumping ground for nuclear wastes. Our cry was..."Let's protect the lives of our children!" We asked for the help of many people in our struggle. Wherever people gathered we went and asked them to sign their names with ours so as to demand that the authorities halt plans for the spent fuels reprocessing plant.

I am a member of the Fujisaki Church, United Church of Christ in Japan, which celebrated its one hundred and fourth anniversary in Aomori Prefecture. Our ancestors received a nursery grown apple tree from an American missionary. Today the area produces apples for Japan, but we are located not too far away from the proposed site of the reprocessing plant. The pastor and the young people of the Fujisaki Church are united in their movement to oppose the reprocessing plant.

Although churches in Japan have not shown interest in social action, the church district assembly voted in 1989 to establish a special committee to oppose the nuclear fuels reprocessing plant. In the same year the Church Women's Federation of the United Church of Christ in Japan held a 20th anniversary meeting in Tokyo. Among the 2,000 participants only 87 women attended the anti-nuclear sub-section meeting for discussions related to the responsibility of peacemakers in the nuclear age.

We invited Ms. M. Watanabe from the Japan YWCA, who was the speaker for the anti-nuclear sub-section meeting in Tokyo, to

our church. After the gathering we went to see the site where the government is planning to build a nuclear fuels reprocessing plant. With the women from Akita and Iwate prefectures we are determined that the beauty of God's creation shall not be destroyed by the unseen death of radiation.

The construction of a petroleum refinery in Aomori prefecture created many refugees as well as great social antagonisms among the villagers in relation to said development. Then a plan for a spent nuclear fuels reprocessing plant came up without any evaluation of the problems involved. Women stood up to oppose the government decision that the land should be used for a nuclear waste dumping ground, and we struggle to sustain the integrity of creation for our children and grandchildren.

We need the help of people the world over in order to stop the destruction God's creation through ever increasing amounts of radiation. Hand in hand we must walk for life and in opposition to destruction.



Photographic Art by Megumi SHIMADA



## THE JAPANESE EMPEROR Symbol, Symptom, System

By TITO GENOVA VALIENTE

The emperor of Japan proclaimed his assent to the Chrysanthemum Throne this last November 12, 1990, on a Monday afternoon. He became the first Japanese monarch with status defined by the post-war constitution: a symbol of the state and the unity of the people. About 2,500 dignitaries from abroad, including the Philippine President, Corazon G. Aquino, were invited to the Imperial Palace for the enthronement ceremonies.

Details of the enthronement ceremonies have been recorded, articulated, and dramatized in newspapers, magazines, and pamphlets. May I recall these things in amusement, because there in those minute details are all the meanings, complexity upon complications, which underscore the processes and planning that went into the graphic production of the enthronement. On the day of the enthronement the emperor sat, or was made to sit upon an elevated throne known as the "Takamikura." The Japanese Prime Minister, Toshiki KAIFU, honored, or was asked to honor the new Emperor with some congratulatory phrases and chant "BANZAI" three times. Some newspapers have in particular pointed out that during this interaction between KAIFU and AKIHITO (the name of the new emperor), rather an interaction between the State and the Emperor, there will have been an attending physical inequality between the two personalities involved. What happened on that day was that since the Takamikura platform rose approximately 1.3 meters high, or even more to include the seat, the Emperor's feet came to the level of the prime minister's chest when KAIFU stood before him to deliver his congratulatory address and shout his "Banzai."

There have been great debates as to how this meeting between AKIHITO and KAIFU should be properly conducted. The protagonists were those composing the government committee for the Ceremonies of the Ascension to the Throne and the

Imperial Household Agency. The debate centered on the place where the prime minister was to have made his address: should it be from the garden or in the same room with the emperor, should the prime minister wear apparel similar to the Heian period attire to be worn by the emperor, and there were many other questions? It was appropriate for some of the more conservative members of the committee and the imperial household to demand that the prime minister deliver his address outside and below the "Matsu-no-Ma." Were the prime minister to do this, he would be in a position marked by a dramatic sense of inferiority in relation to the emperor. Finally, it was decided that the prime minister be in the same room, the "Matsu-no-Ma," with the emperor. This was according to some analysts a demonstration of the status of the emperor being properly defined under the Japanese Constitution. KAIFU with AKIHITO in the same room would signify further the close relationship the emperor maintains with the state and its officials.

The next day, in the mass media there were photographs of the prime minister looking puny, minor, inferior and strange, with hands upraised, shouting his "Banzai." Without knowing what the prime minister was saying, we just see a man in western dress, surrounded by people in Heian-type costumes, looking so out of place, "gaijin" (foreigner) in the Japanese empire, paying homage, in fact, with those hands raised, looking more like he was worshipping the monarch who was looking down on him from the "Takamikura."

In the end, if we are to try to analyze the planning that went into the meeting between the emperor and the prime minister for the first phase of the enthronement ceremonies, it was the Imperial Household Agency which gained the upper hand or won in the fight. For in the end really KAIFU, looking up to the emperor in the Takamikura, looked more like a subject rather than a sovereign. In his swallow tailed coat he appeared like an outcast within this royal display of homegrown and native Japanese rituals.

The debate on other details as to the rituals was raging more even as the special day came closer. A major quarrel



entered on how to blend the religious and the secular, the sacred and, thereby, the profane, as the enthronement ceremonies themselves, by nature and tradition, are really religious in content and context. State officials have down-played the role of religion, Shintoism in particular, in the conduct of the enthronement. On the other hand the spokespersons of the Imperial Palace have repeatedly pointed out the importance of tradition. This means that in the planning of the rituals and ceremonials for the new emperor the only guide that could be followed would be the previous enthronement ceremonies held during the reign of emperors TAISHO and HOWA, respectively. This became an issue because the ceremonies for the two mentioned emperors were all held under theegis of imperial Japan when the State was, figuratively, ceremonially, and, to a large extent, politically, subordinate to the emperor system. This is not saying that to follow the old processes and procedures would actually be tantamount to the rebirth of the old emperor system.

About 300 meters away from the place where the enthronement ceremonies were to be held was the "Kashikodokoro" or Imperial Sanctuary, containing the replica of the sacred imperial mirror. The original of this object is found in the Grand Shrines at Ise where it is enshrined and worshipped as the embodiment of Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess, Founder of the Imperial Family. It is from Amaterasu that the long line of Japanese emperors trace their lineage and divinity. The big question was whether to involve directly this sacred imperial mirror or even bring Amaterasu into the picture during the enthronement ceremonies. Doing so would blatantly articulate the old claim that Japanese emperors form a long unbroken line of gods on earth, with their special loci happening to be imperial Japan with the Japanese being thereby a group of very special people.

It was then decided that the mirror would remain in the sanctuary. A compromise was then met by the Imperial Household Agency and the committee, that the other two sacred treasures associated with the emperor would be used and included during the rituals. These are the Imperial Sword and the Imperial Jewels. The Imperial

Household Agency insisted that these sacred objects are indispensable regalia for the emperor. Together with these would also be included the privy seal and the seal of State because these two objects are related to the public duties of the emperor. In all of these processes, there is always uppermost in the minds of the enthronement organizers the idea that there should always be the constitutionally mandated separation of state and religion.

The decision to include the sword and the jewels was justified by those involved by saying that they were not really religious objects. What is forgotten though is the fact that they, being sacred imperial objects ascribed to the emperor, make the emperor out to be more than human. The use of these objects would make the emperor imperial, seemingly, even in rituals, thereby beyond the control of the State.

Daijosai, the Great Rice Offering ceremony, occupied another major area for debate. According to legend, the Emperor calls down the Sun-Goddess Amaterasu and together they feast on specially cultivated rice. In effect, if we are to really read the legends and myths, this ritual is the most problematic of them all: during the Daijosai, the myth implies that the emperor is to copulate with the Sun Goddess.

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#### THE DEMANDS OF THE GODS

The demands of the gods were so great that the State could not refuse them. The Constitution was simply helpless before Amaterasu. When the smoke of battle died down, the scholars and analysts were appalled to see that the enthronement ceremony was conducted following the ceremonies of past emperors. The enthronement was conducted in accordance with the Imperial rules that were supposed to have been discontinued when the present Constitution was drawn up immediately after the war. In effect, the Imperial Household Agency, showing its power over the State, has used for the enthronement ceremonies, codes, rules, and regulations written and promulgated 80 years ago in the era of Imperial Japan.

The holding of the Daijosai which is a



dramatization of the Imperial system of divine rule and myth, at best articulates how deeply embedded the emperor system is in Japanese politics and culture. How can one declare the "Daijosai" ceremony unconstitutional when there are no laws or legal regulations that mention it. The gods were skillful!

The demands of the gods proved, also to be heavy on the taxpayer's pocket. The whole extravaganza cost the taxpayers 12.3 billion yen. If we are to include the bill spent by the government on the funeral of the late emperor Showa in February last year, the Japanese people have paid about 22.1 billion yen (\$176,800,000) in total expenditures for the Imperial succession.

For a breakdown of this budget, a 5.55 billion yen fund was set aside for the enthronement (almost the same amount spent by Japan for disaster prevention and rehabilitation projects in the aftermath of the Philippine earthquake.)

For the Daijosai, the government set aside 2.57 billion yen (under Japanese aid, only 2 million yen would be needed to rehabilitate many bridges in certain parts of the Philippines.) For the enthronement ceremony, the Japanese government has to spend 420 million yen for purposes of moving two Imperial thrones from Kyoto to Tokyo (under Japan aid to the Philippines, 454 million yen is earmarked for urgent flood control and drainage projects for areas around Manila.)

The emperor's costume is worth 12 million yen while that of the empress is worth 8 million yen, an amount sufficient enough to cover certain irrigation projects in the rural villages in Southeast Asia.

Why am I focusing on these details? Why am I taking the time to dramatize the debates which went on between the State and the Palace for the conduct of the enthronement ceremonies? After the completion of all those details, processes, decisions, and debates, tell me: is there really a constitutional separation of religion and state in Japan? Is Akihito really only a symbol?

#### THE EMPEROR AS SYMBOL

Much has been written about the emperor simply a symbol within present Japanese national development. It is often written that as a family, the Imperial Family, respected as a role model for various groups of people. They are in fact portrayed as wholesome, ordinary, a little affluent perhaps, but set as a family. The Japanese constitution, on the other hand, has often been articulated as supreme code of rules and regulations. I am now in doubt about this. The past few days have seen the enthronement ceremony being held almost independently of all existing laws of the land. What proves supreme during the whole enthronement period including the holding of the "Daijosai," is the fact that in this land myths and lore hold sway over the people. Tradition is a power that not even an American-mandated constitution could control. Religion also is the last thing I wish to criticize, but during the whole enthronement proceedings we find religion to be overwhelming and overpowering. It is therefore the height of naivete to forever claiming that the enthronement ceremonies were held in a highly secular manner; respecting and upholding the validity of the constitution and the State over the validity claims of the emperor and imperial traditions.

In my chosen field, anthropology, religion and symbols are things that attract attentive scholarship. Whenever we observe rituals and the symbols that are used in rituals, we unconsciously raise our research antennae, because we know that during times of rituals and ceremonials, the thoughts and aspirations of the people are articulated and dramatized. We also affirm the idea that symbols are able to condense or retain within small spheres the vast idiosyncracies and ideologies of a nation and its people.

During the enthronement ceremonies, what appears as the most potent symbol of the Japanese nation is the emperor. It was also proved that however much certain sectors tried to separate the State from religion, these two legally separated spheres find an almost natural blending in the Japanese psychology. If we are to begin from the definition of religion as a system of symbols which is capable of



convincing people that the essential meanings of life and the reasons for living are embodied in a being that is superior to them, then we have in the emperor a potent and powerful symbol that gives the people their ethos, or their reasons and justifications for everything. In the Philippines, the Spanish colonizers were able to magnificently utilize the Christian cross as a symbol for the ethos of suffering, then the architects of modern Japan have also been able to exploit, with great sophistication, the emperor as the Japanese ethos for bearing the burden, guilt, and irrationality of war.

#### THE BANZAI NOSTALGIA

The enthronement ceremonies also highlighted the fact that a large number, in truth a majority, of the Japanese population is in favor of the emperor system. During the whole proceedings last November 12, people were interviewed and some were apparently moved by the cries of "Banzai" which resounded all over, all the way from the "Matsu no Ma" to the rural villages of Japan.

My memories were those of the triumphs and victories of the Japanese Imperial Army in the bloody battlefields of Asia. When those elderly lovers of the emperor recall the wartime after they hear again those profuse sounds of "Banzai", do they ever recall that for those glorious "Banzai" cries which they now recall there were large numbers of Filipino women and children and soldiers who were forced to fight a war that was not of their own making? For every shout of "Banzai", for every shout of victory, there is always a corresponding cry out of the depths of death and defeat. This glorification of death also happens, however, much to my regret, in the Philippines, my own country.

During the enthronement ceremonies and the events that followed, through all the banquets and tributes and speeches, it was made sure that the happiness and joy of the events would not be marred by bad thoughts and evil memories. So there was nothing said about an apology, about the war, and about the silent histories of discrimination. If the speeches of the emperor and those around him were silent

about the history of wars and domination that his empire, in being an empire, was guilty of, then the whole of Japanese society is really consistent in its attitude toward the world and its nearest neighbors, the Southeast Asians.

#### THE EMPEROR AS SYSTEM

The emperor is simply not a symbol, single and individual. He actually forms a system. It is from him, symbolically, that the Japanese people came to understand their uniqueness as a people. The emperor forms a system in which he situates himself at the top as the most direct descendant of a long line of Gods with the Japanese people, of a pure and unique race, following. This is an unbroken line not polluted by other lines from outside. The outsider becomes a direct outsider: no amount of processing will ever make him an integral part of Japanese society. This concept, dramatized by the Japanese conceptualization of the "soto" (outside) and the "uchi" (inside), gives rise to the highly internalized system of discrimination that informs Japanese culture. Where do the foreigners situate in this system?

There is in Japan today a phenomenon called the "Japayuki." The "Japayuki" is geographically and physically a foreigner. The "Japayuki" is a label of stigma and it is in the historical order of things that we find the explanations for this stigma. To understand the "Japayuki" is to understand the "Karayuki", the women of the Meiji era who were recruited to work abroad as prostitutes. Because people then could not call them outright prostitutes, they were referred to as "Karayuki" or those who went in that direction. To understand the "karayuki" is also to understand the "Ianfu" or "consolation women," Korean women sent to provide for the sexual needs of Japanese soldiers out in the battlefields. To understand them all, and why Koreans, women, and outsiders are discriminated against in Japanese society is to understand the "Burakumin." But history is silent about them.

#### THE HISTORY OF SILENCE

The system that symbolically upholds the emperor at the top of the social pyramid



also encourages the creation of a hierarchy or system of stratification. This system could not exist if we did not posit the people at the bottom who support the top. The stranger, the "Japayuki," and the "burakumin" all fit perfectly this support role.

A history that is silent about the war and the atrocities committed by the Japanese abroad is also the same perfect history that is silent about the experience or even the mere existence of discrimination and the people subjected to discrimination within a country. Given this, the shouts of "Banzai" that echoed all over Japan are to a large extent the product of a history that silences. Perhaps, the average Japanese would think twice about those "Banzai" if a Filipino would tell him or her that "Banzai" is a reminder to Filipinos of every thing bad and heinous and evil about the Japanese. "Banzai" is not victory or congratulations for Filipinos but rather death and cruelty. Those who express shock as well as those who are ignorant of the war and the cruel Japanese, are themselves the victims of a history of silence.

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This paper was delivered before the "Nihon Kirisuto Kyokai" study series on the emperor system.

### CHRISTMAS REVISITED WASEDA VILLAGE

A Christmas program was held on December 14, 1990 in the Waseda Community and was attended by workers from the Japan Christian Center building, the Waseda Hoshien, and AVACO. The program began with a Christmas service at the Waseda Church attended by 80 people. The Rev. Masaaki NAKAJIMA, General Secretary of the Kyodan, gave a Christmas message entitled "Glory to God in the Highest, and on Earth Peace." (Luke 2:8-14) The following is a summary of his sermon:

"This time of year we hear the music known as the "Messiah" being sung by many groups. It would be true to reality to say that my faith grew when I joined a chorus for the 'Messiah' when I was a

seminary student at Doshisha University. The music emphasizes, 'Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth, good will toward men.' But whenever I read the biblical passage 'on earth peace among those whom He favors!' I was puzzled and wondered why it did not say peace to all persons.

Isaiah 42 tells us 'Behold my servant whom I uphold.' This was quoted in Matthew 12: 18. The Gospel of Mark says, 'Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased.' (1:11) This tells us that the chosen one is the servant. Then, we are able to understand that peace on earth may be possible through sacrificing oneself for others.

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, '.....thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding, and revealed them to babes: for such was thy gracious will.' (10:21,22) Jesus favors children.

Also Jesus 'went up into the hills and called to him those whom he desired.' (Mark 3:13) There is no common qualification for the disciples, beside the fact that they all responded positively when He called.

These are the three important measures for bringing peace on the earth. Salvation is for all people through the love of God. In this Christmas celebration let us pray for 'peace on earth' and respond to God's call."

More than 40 Filipinos who are living in Tokyo held a "Cultural Event" at the Anglican Holy Trinity Church in order to raise funds for children in the Philippines. NCC Women's groups, the Franciscan Chapel and many others supported the program. A Christmas gift donation of 300,000 yen was sent to projects in Manila.

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